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Pres Sulzberger, C.L. Thousand Days

Foreign Affairs: The Light That Failed

By C. L. SULZBERGER

PARIS—The most interesting thing about "A Thousand Days," Arthur Schlesinger's fascinating account of the Kennedy Administration, is that it concentrates on analyzing the late President's foreign policy and in the process—implicity, perhaps unwittingly, proves that it failed.

Schlesinger was a close friend and ardent admirer of Kennedy; yet he is an expert historian. His long tapestry shows that, despite the glowing success of the 1962 Cuba confrontation, and despite the partial test-ban treaty, Kennedy's foreign policy achieved more icing of apparent triumph than cake of positive achievement.

The young, attractive President had many personal meetings with world statesmen. Nevertheless, apart from his warm relationship with Macmillan, these produced few tangible results. Kennedy's talks with de Gaulle, Khrushchev, Sukarno and Nehru, for example, failed. When the President received Ben Bella, the Algerian expressed admiration — and promptly rushed off to see Castro.

Tribute to an Image

After Kennedy's assassination the entire world, including its most famous leaders, expressed unprecedented grief. But this was not necessarily a direct tribute to his diplomatic success. Instead, it showed awareness that a dazzling light which had created a fresh and hopeful American image had been extinguished, and also hinted at uneasy fears that the greatest political crime in our age of instant terror might stem from some evil conspiracy and produce holocaust.

Specific failures of Kennedy foreign policy included the Bay of Pigs disaster, the conception and obfuscation of the multilateral force (M.L.F.) project, the neutralization — instead of partition—of Laos, the effort to disengage Nasser from Yemen, and the Vietnam mess to which, Schlesinger reports, Kennedy realized "he had never really given his full attention."

The Reasons Why

Looking back, one can discern three general reasons for lack of success. The first and most obvious is that Kennedy simply didn't have sufficient time to realize many of his dreams. The second is that Kennedy seemingly discounted his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, favoring the forceful McNamara, and mistrusted State Department and Foreign Service professionals, thus sometimes sacrificing patient expertise to gung-ho activists.

The third is that Kennedy seemed unaware of the contradiction between our expressed intention to seek a world of diversity which would encourage national independence and our intention to stress interdependence, fastening the fate of other nations to our leadership.

Schlesinger belittles Rusk and attributes to Kennedy the intention of seeking his Secretary of State's resignation. He says Kennedy "had to have a McNamara at Defense in order to have a foreign policy at all." Whether Rusk is demeaned because he refused to contribute secrets to Schlesinger's accumulating record, or whether Kennedy really was disappointed, may never be known.

Rusk was certainly not present at the Nassau conference when, in a hastily patched up agreement with the British over the discarded Skybolt, we contributed greatly to NATO's present troubles and de Gaulle's exclusion of Britain from the Common Market. McNamara *was* there.

After Cuba

After the Cuba showdown Kennedy worked for détente with Russia. Prior to the test-ban negotiations he told Averell Harriman: "I have some cash in the bank in West Germany and am prepared to draw on it if you think I should." Publication of this statement must inevitably reinforce European suspicions that the United States could contemplate a deal with Moscow over Europe's head.

Schlesigner implies Kennedy, while sponsoring it, thought "the M.L.F. was something of a fake." He says George Ball was sent to Bonn—before de Gaulle excluded Britain from Europe—to "offset Adenauer's growing fascination with de Gaulle." Put another way, this means—to break up the new French-West German friendship treaty.

There are indications in Schlesinger's book that the Kennedy foreign policy was obsessed with high-sounding slogans like "grand design," often inspired by ghost writers. Thus, it is recounted how Ted Sorensen "applied his brilliant mind and pen to the European tour" made by the President in 1963. One slogan with which we still live but which has produced little concrete is the famous "Alliance for Progress."

Premature Exposure

Any President would suffer from exposure of his day-to-day thinking. Is it wise to permit publication of books like "A Thousand Days" before the passage of time? Officials still in office, like Rusk, are embarrassed and foreign statesmen will hesitate to confide secret opinions if they fear such confidences may soon be advertised in best sellers.

As a reader I am grateful to the talented Schlesinger for his intriguing work. As a columnist I am indebted for his penetrating analysis of policy complexities which explain our present attitudes. But as a U.S. citizen I could have postponed the pleasure.